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THE BOOK OF THE MONTH

ON THE HISTORY OF RELIGIONS

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An authoritative and masterly manual of the History of Religions has appeared in the "Religious Science and Literature Series." This compact, 600-page volume¹ by Professor Hopkins, obviously written for students and other well-informed readers, is replete with the necessary information for the comprehension of the particular religions under discussion. Each chapter is encyclopedic in the sense that it is brief, compressed, and includes the essential details; but it is nevertheless interestingly written, and happily escapes the almost necessary affliction of over-condensation—aridity. The title of the book is taken explicitly; each chapter deals with the history of the religion therein discussed, from its earliest manifestation on the misty horizon of myth and tradition through its diverse developments to decay or present status. The treatise is not so much concerned with any particular theory of the origin of religion or of its classification, but apparently aims to exhibit the facts on which different theories have been built. It considers religion as an expression of various stages of culture found among divergent races.

No present-day student of religion, however, can ignore the defining of his position in relation to other workers in the field, or fail to define religion as he conceives of it, nor does our author side-step this obvious responsibility. After sketching in a brief and pleasing paragraph that of which every writer in this field is painfully aware—the difficulty of attempting a definition of religion—he offers the following: "Reli-

gion is *squaring human life by superhuman life*" (p. 2).

In thus expressing the matter, he is definitely trying to omit what ought not to go into a definition of religion, and to put in what ought to be there. For instance, one should exclude anything implying that man has an innate religious faculty, or that religion necessitates a belief in spiritual powers: one should include a belief in a superhuman power and an adjustment of human activities to the requirements of that power. All this is good; good, too, is the definition insofar as it lets in the disciple of *Positivism* and the *Buddhist*. But the question arises as one views the product of Professor Hopkins' separator, if he has not thrown out the cream and preserved the skimmed milk!

He makes short shrift of the attempts of the psychologists to shed light on the problem of the definition of religion, and pushes Emile Durkheim into a footnote! But at the present time one cannot act thusly in an introductory study of definitions and classifications of religion: psychological and sociological factors are more and more coming in for consideration in an understanding of religion, and one must take some account of them, whether he will or no. Religion touches all life: in the age-long struggle for adjustment to environment, for the perpetuation of life and for its enrichment, it is an integral factor, interwoven through all its activities and inseparable from them. Our approach to religion is and must be *biological*. We cannot confine ourselves to its individual

¹ *The History of Religions*. By E. Washburn Hopkins. New York: Macmillan, 1918. Pp. 624. \$3.00.

aspect, nor to its social, exclusively, but we must somehow acknowledge that both are factors. From a study of primitivity we observe the effort of the group to increase its resources of energy and its efforts to escape suffering, disease, and death. It is, however, open to question how far we may accept the results of the French school of sociologists, though they certainly are registering progress in pointing out that religion is constituted of beliefs and rites. But, of course, their conclusion that the sacred is the product of collective thought our author does well to reject for the present. Professor Hopkins' definition would have been more workable had it been enlarged in scope to approximate that of Dussaud in his *Introduction à l'Histoire des Religions* (1914): "A religion consists of an organized unity of beliefs and rites which aims to increase and perpetuate the principle of life of the individual, of the group, and of nature."

Students of religion are coming to recognize that the conception of *mana*, a vague, impersonal force, a life-power or potency diffused through everything, is farther back in the religious history of the race than anything we have yet begun to theorize upon. Therefore Dr. Hopkins' attitude toward theories of religious beginnings that make religion begin too late, as toward the priority of magic, naturism, and especially animism, is fundamentally sound. He says:

There can be no clear understanding of the foundations of religion without the recognition of the fact that man has passed through a stage where he still fails to discriminate between matter and spirit. Before a belief in freed spirits is possible, man must be able to abstract spirit from body. But, in the thought of the lowest savage, matter and spiritual power are so interrelated that there is no body without conscious power and no spirit without body (pp. 17-18).

It is doubtless because of this thought in the background that throughout the

book the author holds off emphasis on totemism, and points out that in places where in the past investigators found animism, none exists, as for example, he shows that Shinto was not ancestor worship in its more original form (p. 276-77) and that there was no invocation of ancestors, or anything to indicate that the Japanese looked to ghosts to give them goods. One observes our author's good judgment in evidence in other places where he is called upon to express a decision; as his rightly discrediting the idea that messianism appeared in ancient Egypt, and that the influence of Babylonian religion in the Western World is as important as was once assumed.

As is to be expected in such an exhaustive scope of studies as that necessitated by a history of religions, the chapters are of varying caliber. That on Buddhism is very good, and the following one on "Hindu Sectarian Religion" is especially fine, because it presents sympathetically and simply a study of the Vishnu and Shiva sects from their earliest developments through the modern efforts of the reforming sects. In the concluding chapter, "Religion of Christianity," however, we find a ponderous treatise on theological developments. The lack of consideration of social forces is here most obvious. It would seem that a history of Christianity written in our day, though cramped to an essay of fifty pages, should exhibit to us social forces that gave rise to innumerable theological evolutions and convolutions. One could devoutly wish that an opinion of the author expressed on almost the last page had been made the basis for the development of the chapter, for in these words, "The historian turns to the records and sees that all religions tend to express the peoples who hold them" (p. 594), he hints at a *social factor*, and gives us the germ of an idea of vital import in the comprehension of religious faiths and developments.